

BLIZZARD OF '49, WYOMING PUBLIC TELEVISION ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

Nonnie: My name is Leona Crane. Everybody calls me Nonnie. I'm the little sister Larry was talking about. We spent our winter of '49, it seems like shoveling every day. Of course the facility was outside, so that was the first path that got shoveled. It probably got shoveled twice more during the day. It was my job to feed the chickens, and carry water to them. The adults would shovel the path. Not only was I young, I was short for my age. Short, little, small, whatever. I was absolutely forbidden to get off of those paths. I couldn't. After a while I couldn't have got off the path anyway because it was deep. I would carry water and food to the chickens every day. Made sure they were all right, gather the eggs. One of the things was the water source in the house. Of course, we didn't have running water. It came in, in buckets.

The pump was way out there. It was covered up with snow bank. You take a bucket and a kettle. You go out and you bring in buckets of snow to sit on a stove to melt for drinking water. You'd get a whole bucket of snow, and you'd know you had at least a half a bucket of water. You'd get through, you had maybe an inch and a half at the bottom of the bucket. It was really discouraging. Lots and lots of buckets of snow brought in.

Speaker 2: Because it was so dry, it didn't have a lot of moisture.

Nonnie: It was and then snow ... You don't get much water [00:02:00] out of that much snow anyway, no matter. It was dry. Every day that was a routine. If we were going to have drinking water in the house, you went out and you brought it in that way, and you'd sit it on the back of the stove, and it would melt down. Mom would take the tea kettle and pour a little hot water in there and get it started. You figured you were going to have at least a half a bucket of water. You were lucky if you had an inch and a half in the bottom of the bucket. You considered you're lucky.

While that was melting, you went and got the other bucket, and you did it all over again. Trying to get anywhere was so impossible. We were fortunate. We had a wood source. We had plenty of wood and we had coal. We stayed warm. Once you got in from outside, you could get dry and fairly comfortable. It's like Larry said, you didn't go upstairs. You would have froze down if you had in that house where we lived. For a short period of time, the wind had piled the snow in almost the upstairs window. That didn't last. It blew it right out just like it blew it in. You could look right down over the side bank down to the river.

Everything was using Larry's little hole that he chopped out. I think probably all the [00:04:00] wildlife around was probably drinking there too. You didn't see

them because you didn't spend much time out there looking, because it was so cold. There was so much wind. That is what I remember the most is the wind. It was so cold, and always, the wind was blowing 24 hours a day. It just never stopped.

Speaker 2: It was kind of a shifting wind too, wasn't it?

Nonnie: A drift [inaudible 00:04:28]. You didn't know where it was going to blow from. It blew in from all directions. It seemed like almost at the same time. I know that's not possible but that was almost what it was like.

Speaker 2: How did the chickens fare? They did okay?

Nonnie: They did good. We had a chicken house that had a south glass big windows, in the south. Put a lot of warmth in there. Chickens, if they're not warm and comfortable with a lot of light, tend to quit laying in the winter. This, with the south facing windows, our chickens laid all winter. It was a good thing, because we ate a lot of eggs. We did all right. We did better than some. Not as good as others, but we did all right. If I live to be 114, I never want to see another winter like that. It was sad. This particular area, we were lucky. We didn't lose people. We lost livestock and the wildlife ... It just devastated the wildlife. The snow went off in the spring, you could see all sorts of animals laying somewhere [00:06:00]. After I was grown up, I was working for a little guy. He had been the mayor at one time in Douglas. He ran a restaurant here. I was working for him. He was one of the ones that volunteered to go on these military planes that came up from Cheyenne on these hay drops.

He said that was quite an experience. Of course they were roped. They were safe. If they fell out, they could dole them back. He said there was a couple of times some of them almost did go out the door along with the bales. He said after the first couple of days, when they were dropping, they said the horses, even cattle, would hear those planes, and they'd start going towards the area where they would drop them. They'd try to find a place that was blown off, so that there was as little snow as possible. They'd drop there so they could get as much of the hay as they possibly could.

He said it was fascinating. They would circle the area and see those horses moving right up to that bare spot ready to have breakfast, thank you. He said it was great. Then he was like I just said. He said he hoped he never had to do it again. I can understand that. The local people were great. It's like Larry said. They just opened their homes and took in us kids. It was our bus driver and his wife. They were a young couple, little girl, tiny. They took us kids in like the orphans we were temporarily.

Speaker 2: Not thinking twice [00:08:00] about it. Just the right thing to do.

Nonnie: No sir. That was, "You're coming home with us," was the words. We were just kids. How were we to know? I guess we thought maybe we were going to spend the night in the gym or something, but we didn't.

Speaker 2: Do you remember the streets in Douglas?

Nonnie: What little we saw was just from to school, back in the bus and home. When dad, when it got so that he could go to down, or they could go to town and shop, usually it was on same type of day that we could go to school. As far as getting downtown, no. Then of course I was a kid, 9, something like that. All I knew is that it was cold and I was miserable. My feet ... I didn't think my feet were ever going to be warm again. I don't care how many overshoes you have on, it's cold. It was the kind of cold with the wind behind it. It's like Larry said, there was always frost and snow crystals in the air because of the cold. It was just miserable. It peppered your face. I can remember that. It would sting when wind would blow that into your face.

Speaker 2: Do you recall anybody in your family or people that you know getting any severe frostbite?

Nonnie: Not really. Of course this was a rural community. You planned ahead. If you were going out, you dressed for it. Vanity didn't come into it. You [00:10:00] dressed for comfort, not for [speed 00:10:03].

Speaker 2: You were talking about these hay drops ... What was this guy's name?

Nonnie: Vance Liefer.

Speaker 2: Yeah. Volunteered to do this because they were ... Was the Air Force looking for people in the area so they knew the area?

Nonnie: Yeah. Basically they furnished the planes. I assume there was some military people involved too, but there was also a lot of civilians that volunteered to help out.

Speaker 2: I understand something called the civil air patrol. People with private planes that were ...

Nonnie: I think probably some. Of course, where we were out in the country, you'd hear a plane go over, but you didn't know whether it was military or private unless you could see it. You didn't go outside to look.

Speaker 2: I know some ranches were getting supplies dropped for because they were running [crosstalk 00:11:10].

Nonnie: In that era there was no snowmobiles, that type of thing. They may get the kind of a bad storm now, but they have the equipment to counteract it, to work with it we didn't have then. Cars, trucks, usually not four wheel drive anything. You did a lot of shoveling. I'm like Elaine. I wouldn't care if I never saw another shovel. I have, but I mean that's how it is. You don't have to enjoy it.

Speaker 2: This is one that's [00:12:00] just really etched in your mind.

Nonnie: Oh yeah. As I said, if I lived to be 114, I just don't want to see another one. I had a friend who said, "I'd love to see a winter like that." I said, "No you wouldn't." It was just too devastating. It was sad. Not particularly in this area you didn't lose people, but we lost livestock and we lost wildlife. Vehicles went down. Houses leaked and roofs leaked, and so on.

Speaker 2: People pitched in.

Nonnie: Yeah, they did. As a general rule, the world is full of good people. All you have to do is find them.

Speaker 2: I was asking Elaine as a kid, she said she never played much in the snow.

Nonnie: No. By the time you got your chores done, you were so cold, you were just glad to get in. Mom always had a fire going in the kitchen range. She baked bread. She baked all her own bread. The days that she baked, that smelled so good in there. You could get warm.

Speaker 2: That's about it?

Nonnie: That's it, I think. That's it. No more. Thank you.

Speaker 2: Hello.

Nonnie: I don't mind reminiscing, but I just don't want to do it again.

Speaker 2: Thanks, Nonnie.

Nonnie: You're welcome.

Speaker 2: That was great [00:14:00].